

casus belli by handydandynotebook

Series: plans? what freakin' plans, one-shots keep becoming series, i am drowning in wip, pls help me. [1]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Aftermath of Violence, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Attempted Murder, Billy Hargrove Lives, Gen, Hospitals, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Domestic Violence, Major Character Injury, Mother-Daughter Relationship, Painkillers, Post-Season/Series 03

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Characters: Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Susan Hargrove

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove & Susan Hargrove, Susan Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

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Summary:

“Max?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you bring Billy back? I wanna fight with him too.”

“What?” Max gasps, bemused.

“I have a bone to pick with that boy,” Mom says, muzzy eyes half-lidded as she vaguely jabs a finger in the air. “He gave my sixteen year old a loaded gun and didn’t even tell me.”

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Author's Note:

evidently errything i do gets continued now. idfk. so much wip. direct continuation of the last part of xen. albeit this is prolly understandable enough by itself.

direct inspo [taken from the incident in virginia beach where this guy from florida rly did get paralyzed by his estranged stepdaughter whilst beating her mom with a wrench.](#)

if this has a fuck ton of typos, i apologize and will edit at home. edited most of this on my phone at work bc today was a double n i had some downtime.

Max strokes her mother's hair as softly as she can, gingerly guiding her fingertips around the goose egg where Neil whacked her with the wrench, gash no less grisly to Max's eyes even now sutured up. It's been hours but Max still feels rattled even though she won't cry, can't cry because she needs to be strong and calm for Mom. Being this close to Mom helps marginally at least. Close enough to touch and feel and watch her breathe, know she is alive even though she'd been so terribly still on the floor, hadn't let out any sound nor even twitched after the gun went off and Neil collapsed atop her.

Max's eyes dart toward sudden movement in her peripheral. She expects a nurse or maybe another cop but it's Billy in the doorway, denim jacket buttoned, hands stuffed in the pockets of his blue jeans. He gives a nod, gaze flickering to her mother in the hospital bed. Max exhales softly as she draws her hand from Mom's head and trots across the eggshell tile. She tried to call earlier but he didn't answer. She deduces the authorities must've contacted him about Neil.

Max isn't normally the hugging type but today has been an exceptionally scary day and in all truth, part of her wasn't sure she'd ever see Billy again at all. Leaving Neil meant leaving so many things behind, her school, her friends, Hawkins. Billy too. She throws her arms around his middle and squeezes tight, tight, tight as a

tourniquet.

Billy grunts, caught off guard, but then he breathes out and winds an arm around her.

“Hey, shitbird...”

Max thinks his voice sounds weird. She swallows and lets go, tugging at the drawstrings of her hoodie as she takes a step back.

“Hey,” she returns and it is the least of things there are to say. “The cops tell you everything?”

“I don’t know about everything.” Billy looks pale as his eyes dart between Max and her mother. “How’s Susan?”

“In and out. She might be in and out for awhile. Neil busted her head open and she’s still all doped up...I don’t think she remembers coming in or getting x-rays, or anything.”

Max uncertainly wiggles her hand as she glances back over her shoulder. Mom is dozing again, looks so fragile in the bed, legs swaddled so thick in their splints, toes just barely peeking out, chest tube as big around as a highlighter emerging from the slit in her gown and going into the drainage unit on the floor.

“My dad really did a number on her...”

“No shit, Billy, he was trying to kill her. He was yelling about how he wouldn’t let her run away again. ‘No more running!’ That’s what he was yelling that when I pulled the trigger.” Max rubs her forearms, swears in her soul she can still feel the recoil riddle thorough her bones.

She only fired once and Neil folded like a fancy dinner napkin right on top of Mom. Then Max couldn’t tell whose blood was whose.

“I’m sorry,” Billy grates out, grave and low.

“She’ll be fine. I’ll take good care of her,” Max declares, soft but determined. “I have practice and Mom’s bound to be a way easier patient than you were, anyway.”

She'd had to help Mom out with Billy after the Mind Flayer. Neil was weirdly gentle with Billy for a little bit in the beginning, when it looked like he might die. But when he started getting stronger and turned around for the better, Neil could barely be bothered to lift a finger. Didn't contribute much to her brother's recovery beyond complaining about medical bills and making a bunch of negotiations over the phone with the insurance company.

"No, Max, I'm apologizing because this is my fault," Billy bows his head, eyes glued to the floor as his shoulders tense. "It's my fault he found you, I'm sorry."

A cold feeling creeps beneath her skin.

"What?"

"It was stupid, I was stupid," he says, voice seeping shame. "I got you a new skateboard since I broke your other one. Decided I'd mail it to you, so I got it packaged up and all that, hid it under my bed. My dad trashed my room looking for some shit he thought I stole and he found that instead. With the address."

Max clenches her teeth. In the recesses of her mind, she realizes it was an accident. Of course it was an accident. But. The way Mom screamed. Gunpowder scorching Max's nostrils. Whose blood is whose. Mom not moving. Safety wasn't safety even in Springwood, Ohio with different names and plate numbers, wasn't safe in a million years because of the way Mom screamed and Max, who hadn't been going by Max in public in Ohio, knew precisely who and what was ripping their new life to pieces in the way Mom screamed.

It was an accident but Max can still feel the recoil, Max is the recoil and Mom was one missed shot away from a coffin. Neil swung the wrench and Mom's lung popped like a happy birthday balloon before Max's hands could go steady enough to pop a cap. Mom's courage has been rewarded with broken bones and blood and confusion, but well. It was an accident.

"I tried to stop him, Max."

"Go away."

“I tried to stop him, I swear—“

“Go away!” Max snaps, louder. “Get away from me! Get away from my mom!”

“Who’s fighting?” her mother groggily asks as she stirs behind her.

Billy relents under Max’s dark glare, shuffling a few steps back and turning away.

“Max?”

“I’m here, Mom.” Max retreats back to her mother’s bedside and smiles gently in assurance, placing a chary hand on her forearm.

“Was that Billy?” Mom blinks up at her, nose twitching as she gives a little sniff. “You smell like Billy.”

“Uh, yeah. Billy’s here. Neil’s here too but he can’t hurt us. Do you remember that?”

“Mhm.” Mom gives the slightest of nods and covers Max’s hand with her own. “Max?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you bring Billy back? I wanna fight with him too.”

“What?” Max gasps, bemused.

“I have a bone to pick with that boy,” Mom says, muzzy eyes half-lidded as she vaguely jabs a finger in the air. “He gave my sixteen year old a loaded gun and didn’t even tell me.”

“Uh, okay, I fully understand why that would bother you. And I also didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to freak you out—“

“You should’ve told me too,” her mother declares, almost petulant as her lips purse sternly.

“—but you realize I saved us both because I shot Neil, right?”

“It’s the principle of the matter, Maxine,” Mom insists. “Neither of

you asked me for permission, neither of you said a word. Billy got a loaded gun from the safe and gave it to you, so I'm upset...and I need to yell at him. Bring him back."

Max splutters, dumbfounded. Her mother is definitely as high as a kite. Her voice is so weak Max doesn't know how she expects to yell at all. But she can't refuse her request when she's somehow striking that tone of maternal authority Max suddenly feels compelled to obey, even as hurt and dopey as she is.

"Okay, Mom. I'll go find him."

"Thank you."

Max tenderly brushes a kiss over her mother's temple. When she gets to the doorway she hesitates for a few heartbeats, gaze lingering on Mom. She isn't particularly keen on letting Mom out of her sight right now. Her stomach flip-flops the way it did a few hours ago, when they took her down for x-rays without Max in attendance.

She reminds herself it's fine. The only person who wanted to hurt Mom is Neil. Neil is paralyzed from the waist down and handcuffed to his own hospital bed. He's not lurking around the corner or hiding in the shadows. He's not belly-crawling the corridors like some vengeful serpent.

Neil's room is eventually where Max locates Billy. The door is shut. The blinds are drawn. Max cannot see inside but it is Neil's room nonetheless, an officer standing guard and munching on a sprinkled, pink frosted doughnut with such gusto it's like he's intentionally trying to be a cliché. Billy is a few lengths away, gnawing at his fingernails, one shoulder leaned against the wall.

"Found you," Max greets.

Billy bites the corner of his thumbnail and stiffly lowers his hand to his side. "Found me? You're the one who told me to fuck off."

"Yeah, well..." Max crosses her arms as she leans against next to him, idly kicking her heel against the wall. "If you knew he was coming, why didn't you call the cops?"

"I tried to stop him, Max. We got into it. He choked me out and locked me in the hall closet."

"Holy shit. You got out?"

"With some splinters in my knuckles," Billy huffs bitterly. "Yeah, wish I would've thought to feel up on the top shelf sooner. My old Little League bat was up there. That helped."

"Damn...look, I'm sorry i jumped down your throat earlier, okay?" Max uncrosses her arms and glances down to Billy's hand at his side, exhales through her nose as she notes the bloodied knuckles. "It's been a fucking awful day and I'm trying to be brave and calm for Mom, but..."

"Don't. I deserve it. It's my fault."

"You're not the one who broke into our house with a goddamn wrench like some horror movie villain."

Billy just shakes his head.

"Anyway, we'd better get a move on. Because my mom wants to see you but I don't know how long she's going to be awake."

Billy blinks rapidly, squinting his eyes. "She wants to see me?"

"Yeah, come on." Max grabs him by the arm and starts to pull, only to let go when his face crumples into discomfort. "Oh. Hey, how bad, um...are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Just kinda stiff, long drive didn't help."

Max nods and leads him back to Mom's room without any more grabbing. Billy plods beside her and now that she's paying attention, she realizes how purposeful his steps are. He doesn't do any of those restless little movements typical of him, no finger drumming or collar adjusting. He's moving no more or less than he has to. Definitely sore.

Max pulls up the chair for him when they get to Mom's room, right beside her bed so neither have to strain to reach for the other.

"There you are," her mother announces, twirling her index finger at Billy.

"Here I am," Billy agrees, flashes a sad smile as he slowly lowers into the seat. "Hey, Susan. How you feeling?"

"Upset," she says decisively, narrowing her eyes as Max pointedly mouths 'painkillers' to Billy. "You and I need to have a talk, mister. What you did was very irresponsible and I am sorry to say I'm disappointed in you. I--"

"I'm sorry," Billy blurts, interrupting as he abruptly bows so low, like he would to dodge whenever Neil would throw shit at him. "I'm sorry, Susan. I'm so, so sorry."

Mom blinks rapidly, confused as Billy starts blubbering. His denim clad shoulders tremble as sobs quibble out of him one after the next. He keeps apologizing between them, grief stricken and fraught with guilt. She hasn't seen him cry like this since the sauna test.

"Oh my...I'm upset, yes, b-but not that upset, Billy..." Anxiety tweaks her mother's features, her fingers warily fluttering over the guardrail that separates them.

Max lays a hand on his back and leans in.

"Listen," she murmurs, gentle but firm. "If you need a minute, you need a minute but don't scare my mom."

"I'm sorry," Billy repeats, this time to Max as he visibly struggles to pull it together. "But it's my fault."

"Oh, it's not all your fault," Mom insists. "Maxine had ample opportunity to come to me about Neil's...Astral Tyrannosaur?"

"Astra Terminator," Max corrects.

"Mm, that then." Mom's lashes flutter sleepily.

"The gun," Billy echoes. "We're talking about the gun?"

"It really wasn't right to keep it from me," her mother says, adamant

and perhaps a little sulky. "But I suppose I came on a little too strong. Max, could you pass me those tissues?"

"Sure." Max grabs the paperboard box on the beside table and passes it to her.

Mom pulls a few from the box and reaches up, dabbing at Billy's blotchy face. He doesn't say anything. He goes quiet, snuffling softly only a bit.

"There, there," Mom soothes. "We're all here. That's what matters most."

Max shifts her weight from foot to foot and takes the tissue box back.

"I'm okay," Mom says, sudden and hasty like she's not entirely confident. "You shouldn't worry so much...either of you."

"No one is worried, Mom," Max promises. She winds around to the opposite side of the bed and pulls up her own chair, warmly pressing her lips to her mother's cheek. "We know you're okay. Just a little banged up."

And that's an understatement, but at the very least, Mom *will* get better. And Neil won't. They're free.

Her mother leans in and briefly nuzzles Max's cheek in return until her face is nestled into the pillows again. Having said her piece and with Billy calmed down, she seems relaxed again. She curls toward Max as much as her upper body will allow and with a little more hair stroking, nods off again.

Billy gets up to leave. Max catches his eye and shakes her head. His mouth quirks at the corner and he resumes his seat.

Author's Note:

if my plans go right i will be posting in the follow order, the next axe snafu au part, the next gay

garbage disposal au part, more flora, more abcs. let's see if i can stick to that plan.

on another note, i've just realized i've officially hospitalizes erry member of the fam but max?? ig i gotta have some fic where i fuck up max to cover all my bases.